

History of Greek Anarchism Series

THE DEMOCRATIC ASSOCIATION OF PEOPLE IN PATRAS AND THE NEWSPAPER “HELLENIC DEMOCRACY”

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During the second half of the 19th century, Patras (in Western Peloponnese, Western Greece) and Ermoupolis (capital of the island of Syros) were the two largest ports of Greece and along with Athens were the first urban and commercial centres in the country.

During 1860s, an Italian community constituted the 10% of the local total population in Patras playing an important role in the everyday life of the city. This migrant community established during 1848-1850 by refugees, mostly socialists and anarchists, after the collapse of the revolutionary movements of 1848-1849. But it seems that the bulk of Italians left the city in late 1860 to early 1870 and only a small number of Italians remained. Most historians argue that anarchist ideas have emerged in Greece, either by the radical elements who resided in the Ionian Islands or by the occasional activity by a few European anarchists and other revolutionaries, such as the Italian anarcho-socialist Amilcare Tspiriani and French revolutionary Gustave Flourans. Also, the events of the Paris Commune of 1871 seem to have had a catalytic effect to the radical elements of Patras particularly and the Western Peloponnese in general. So, apparently small groups of friends or clubs, or secret discussion societies seem been formed.

We are in a period when in, on one side, the capitalist development started to emerge in Greece through the inflow of foreign capital by which the first industrial units, banks and various companies created and, on the other side, an overall bad situation and disorderly was dominant, with the Raisin Issue especially in Western Peloponnese. Amongst those

conditions anarchists and other revolutionaries of this period found a fertile ground to propagate and disseminate their ideas to the oppressed people of Patras and surrounding small towns villages. The social divisions and inequality have proved to be strong determinants in the development of anarchist and revolutionary ideas. Already in 1864, in Patras, several revolutionaries incited their ideas, trying to rouse the people. Among them was someone named Theotokatos for who said that he incited at every opportunity the anarchist ideas, though there are no other details about him.

In early 1876, the Democratic Association of People formed in Patras. The most important members of this Association were intellectuals and a few employees. They were Dionysis Ampelikopoulos, a high school mathematician who had a knowledge of anarchist, socialist and revolutionary tendencies of the period, Konstantinos Mpompotis, a lawyer, Konstantinos Grimmanis, Alexandros Eymorfopoulos (son of the owner of the printing company "Phoenix" and newspaper editor Panagiotis Evmorfopoulos), Ioannis Asimakopoulos, George Paparritor, a rentier (who later worked with socialist Plato Drakouli), Dimitris Spatharas, Panagiotis Sougleris and George Stratos. John Filios was the link of the Association with revolutionary circles of Athens.

The members of the Association were meeting in a special place where there was a remarkable library decorated with Paris Commune images. Along with the Association, a circle of youngsters, mostly students, formed as well as the People's School, a kind of open university, after the initiative of liberals such as Andreas Rigopoulos, Vasilis Kalliontzis and others.

Of the first actions of the Association was the publication of a newspaper and contacts with revolutionary groups from around Greece and abroad. They established contacts with anarchists of Bern in Switzerland, where by then were the headquarters of the First International from which they asked to have regular contacts. The International responded positively and sent in Patras the Minutes of the International Conference of Bern, held during 26-29 October 1876.

On October 22, 1876, in «Bulletin of Jura Federation» had been stated that *«a specific number of socialists from this country will send to Bern a document in which they set out their ideas on the organisation of our work. They commissioned the reading of this document to comrade Andrea Costa (Italian anarchist who later was one of the founders of Italian Socialist Party), who resides in Switzerland. This will be the first time that Greece will take part in a Conference of the International».*

The decisions of the Conference were sent to Patras' anarchists. In turn they sent a message by which made known that they agree with them. Thus, they associated with the International Bureau. The letter was published in «Bulletin of Jura Federation», dated 7 January, 1877.

The Bern Congress ratified collectivism as a key element of the propaganda of the International, and the Democratic Association of People agreed with it. Thus, the Association through the International established contacts with Italian anarchist groups and magazines, such as «Il Plebe» from Milan and «Il Martello» from Bologna, where their members send letters and news. Having strongly sided with the decisions of the Bern Conference, Democratic Association decided also to proceed with the anarchist side.

Having, however, noted that these anarchists of Patras had established contacts with individuals and groups from the Ionian islands, Cyclades and the rest of Peloponnese, we should say that they rather exchanged views and had resulted in the establishment of a federal organisation named Democratic People's League. And this is why when in May 1877 they began publishing the newspaper «Hellenic Democracy» aiming to be the instrument of Democratic People's League. (But because of persecution, as we shall see, the newspaper published just a single issue). Moreover, radical socialist Panagiotis Panas was in contact with the Association since almost their foundation and, indeed, he published the news of the founding of the Federation on the issue of 22 March 1877 of one of his newspapers «Rigas».

However, in May 1877 we have the publication of «Hellenic Democracy», but not as an instrument of the Federation, rather as an instrument of the Democratic Association of People. The newspaper published the Statutes of the Democratic People's and an analysis on this, an article of the French communard Arnold for the then sixth anniversary of the Paris Commune, another article on the Oriental Question in which they called upon the peoples and various ethnicities of Eastern Europe to revolt against the Ottoman and Tsarist rule, and a story about the uprising of Benevento, translated from the Italian «Il Plebe». (In April 1877, Carlo Cafiero, Errico Malatesta and other anarchists occupied the villages Letino and Gallo in Benevento province of Italy, in an attempted uprising which was suppressed). In the forefront of the newspaper raised the slogan «Revolution is a law of progress».

It is important also to note here the option to write in plain and understandable language. This language placement at a time when Giannis Psycharis (a writer) and the movement of demoticism had not appeared yet, ranks them (probably) amongst the pioneer demoticists. It is believed that, because libertarian socialist Nicholaos Konemenos lived those days in Patras, possibly members of the Association have read his work on the language issue (published in 1873) or have been contacted him through the circle of radical socialist Panagiotis Panas. Since 1869, N. Konemenos lived in Patras as a Consul of Turkey (which was a rather decorative position), a position which, however, prohibited such contacts by him.

The publication of «Hellenic Democracy» caused a sensation and raised serious concerns amongst the closed society of Patras. When it became known that the authors and editors of the new newspaper were the sons of really familiar conservative families of the city, a big part of the mainstream press tried to ridicule them. «*A rug published, a children's newspaper by 6-7 kids*», wrote newspaper «Achaia». «*It is about 7-8 youngsters and everyone is laughing with them*», wrote newspaper «Filodimos». Other newspapers such as «Minos» and «Forologoumenos», asked for a punishment for the editors.

But they were not only the closed Patras' society and the local Press who worried about.

Almost simultaneously with the publication of the newspaper the central authorities in Athens officially began the persecution of the members of the Association and, indeed, in a systematic way. So, following government instructions, the prosecutor G. Lyberakis, ordered the prosecution and the investigator St. Mpalmis began in investigative work. Police raided the house where the Association based and arrested D. Ampelikopoulos, K. Mpompotis, K. Grimmanis, A. Eymorfopoulos, Spatharas and Asimakopoulos who remanded in custody. Those arrested were not denied their ideas, failed, however, to reveal names, partners, and anything else associated with the Association and its activities. They said they were bound by an oath not to reveal anything.

Almost the whole mainstream Press came against them, except the newspaper «Toxotis» of A. Papagiannakopoulos. Their case reached the Parliament, where actively defended them the radical MP, Pokkos Choidas. Also, one of their most ardent defenders was Panayiotis Panas, through the columns of his newspapers «Ergatis» («Worker») and «Rigas» (which was the organ of the Democratic Society «Rigas» members of which except Panayiotis Panas and Rokkos Choidas, were liberals Alexis Olympios, Tassos Stypis, Georgios Filaretos and others).

The arrested sent a letter from inside the prison in Jura Federation and also another letter published in 10 June, 1877, the «Bulletin of Jura Federation».

Their case became also international and there was some pressure on the then Greek government by different perspectives, so they all been released in late July 1877 after paying a guarantee. Their trial never happened. According to local working class Marxist historian Dimitris Kougioufas, the financial guarantee paid by Theodoros Kolokotronis, son of Gennaios Kolokotronis and grandson of the famous Theodoros Kolokotronis (a hero of the 1821 Revolution against Ottoman Empire). (For the history, we must note that Theodoros Kolokotronis was born in 1829 and died in 1894. He studied at the Military Academy and a military school in France, where he was influenced by revolutionary ideas. With the nickname Falex wrote the story of his grandfather linked the events of the Revolution of 1821 with those of the Paris Commune of 1871). Nevertheless, because

they classified as «dangerous anarchists» were put under surveillance.

Also, the lawyer Vasilis Kalliontzis, was one of those opposed the anarchists of the Democratic Association, and he published a statement in the newspaper «Toxotis» in 15 April 1877. For the history, we note that Vasilis Kalliontzis in 7 November 1872, started the publication of the newspaper «Hellenic Revolution», subtitled «All for each, each for all» and through which proclaimed liberal ideas of MP and writer, Andreas Rigopoulos, who had personally met Karl Marx. The newspaper stopped its circulation in 10 November 1875 published 64 issues. It re-appeared again in April 1879, and reprinted in 22 February, 1886, published 174 additional issues. Later in the 1890s Vasilis Kalliontzis was associated with the anarchist collective and newspaper «Epi ta Proso» («Forward») but we cannot claim that he was a dedicated anarchist, he rather just helped in translating documents. In 1897 he published a part of the work of Andreas Rigopoulos, entitled «Political Struggle. Literary and political works of Andreas Rigopoulos published by his friend Vasilis Kalliontzis».

Returning to the anarchists of Democratic Association, when they released from prison, not all of them continued their activities. Konstantinos Grimmanis in the 1880s worked with the newspaper «Peloponnese». Alexandros Eymorfopoulos became a publisher and started a patriotic newspaper called «Epi ta Proso» (which is the same newspaper that in the 1890s changed hands, went to anarchist Giannis Magkanaras and during 1890s became the mouthpiece of the same name anarchist collective). Those who continued their action were Dionysios Ampelikopoulos, lawyer Konstantinos Mpompotis and George Paparritor. In 1882 Mpompotis elected secretary of Achaikos Association (a cultural league in Patras) and gave lectures on human rights published also in the newspaper «Ergatis». Paparritor took part in establishing of a socialist circle led by Plato Drakouli in 1885 in Athens. The same circle involving the very young then anarcho-socialist Stavros Kallergis, radical MP Rokkos Choidas, and socialists Georgios Hairetis and Heracles Giarmas.

Dionisis Ampelikopoulos was the only who continued the correspondence with anarchist

groups and foreign publications until at least early 1880s, sending responses and news, most of which were published in the «Bulletin of Jura Federation». But those contacts were lost due to the progressive decline of the national federations-branches of the International, mainly driven by the suppression after a transnational European agreement in the 1870s, which Greece attended amongst other countries.

The issue of «Bulletin of the Jura Federation» of 26 August 1877, published a letter by Dionysis Ampelikopoulos, with the information that had been formed anarchist groups in Messini, Filiatra, Aigio and the island of Kefalonia, which together with the already existing groupings of early anarcho-syndicalist tendencies of the island of Syros and Athens, directed towards the establishment of a Federation. The reality of course proved different as such a Federation never formed.

According to a letter by Dimitris Karampilias (one of the most significant anarchist in Patras in the 1890s) to Giannis Kordatos (a leading marxist historian) in the second half of the 1940s, Dionysis Ampelikopoulos -who originated from the island of Kefalonia-worked as a mathematician in a high school of Messolongi when in 1874, three years before the establishment of the Democratic Association, returned to Patras to work in another high school there replacing someone G. Zalouchos who was accused of pedophilia and kicked out. On his return, according to D. Karampilias, *«begins the socialist movement, as he was one of the leaders, and the soul of the Democratic Association of the People»*. According to contemporary marxist historian and academic Panagiotis Noutsos, in 1884 Ampelikopoulos was hired *«on the services of the Municipality of Patras on wage»* responsible for assisting the dried grape producers (because except Mathematics Ampelikopoulos studied Agronomy as well). From 1904 he used to work in a Poultry School of Kallithea. However, there are no further information available about D. Ampelikopoulos, as his tracks have since been lost.

Later, Elias Synodinos (1845-1906), who in the last quarter of the 19th century had a strong presence in Patras as a public orator, poet, journalist and lawyer, used his verse and satirical poetry against the Democratic Association of People in his satirical weekly

newspaper «Kentra» which he was published for a short time. In the same newspaper he also presented a totally anti-anarchist and anti-socialist political perspective.

***Article taken from No God-No Master**

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